

House Speaker Johnson is insisting on sweeping border security changes in a deal for Ukraine aid

By STEPHEN GROVES and LISA MASCARO

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — House Speaker Mike Johnson told fellow Republicans on Tuesday that sweeping changes to U.S. border policy would be their "hill to die on" in negotiations over President Joe Biden's nearly \$106 billion package for the wars in Ukraine and Israel and other security needs.

Johnson delivered the hard-line message Tuesday morning ahead of classified briefings the Biden administration organized to underscore how desperately the aid is needed. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy was scheduled to address the senators via video but had to cancel his appearance, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said.



Speaker of the House Mike Johnson, R-La., meets with reporters to discuss GOP efforts to investigate President Joe Biden and his son Hunter Biden, at the Capitol in Washington, Wednesday, Nov. 29, 2023.

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(AP Photo/J. Scott Applewhite)

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House Speaker Johnson is insisting on sweeping border security changes in a deal for Ukraine aid

Continued from Front

Biden is pushing a reluctant Congress to approve the military, economic and humanitarian aid package, but the injection of border security into the negotiations has made progress difficult. "The battle is for the border," Johnson said at a news conference. "We do that first as a top priority, and we'll take care of these other obligations." Moments earlier, Johnson told GOP lawmakers in a closed-door meeting that their "hill to die on" in the negotiations was border policy, according to a Republican in the meeting. Conservatives are pressing for the provisions in H.R. 2, a bill they passed in May that would restart construction of walls along the southern border and make it drastically more difficult for migrants to claim asylum in the U.S. Johnson reiterated his stance in a letter to the White House on Tuesday, one day after officials warned that the U.S. will run out of funding to send weapons and assistance to Ukraine by the end of the year, threatening its ability to fight Russia's invasion.



Senate Majority Leader Sen. Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., speaks to media after a Senate Democratic policy luncheon, Tuesday, Dec. 5, 2023, on Capitol Hill in Washington.
(AP Photo/Stephanie Scarbrough)

In the Senate, Schumer was pushing toward a test vote Wednesday on the emergency funding for Ukraine, Israel, and other national security needs, but without the border provisions Republicans are demanding. He described the package as crucial to ensuring the future of Ukraine and democracy. "This is a turning point in Western civilization," Schumer told reporters at a news conference. Schumer added that Johnson told him in a private meeting that he could not pass the supplemental package

through the House without H.R. 2 attached. The GOP's demands could imperil any legislation that emerges from the Senate, where a bipartisan group is trying to find agreement on a pared-down set of border policy proposals. Republicans in those negotiations have acknowledged they are not insisting on the broad policies included in the House's legislation, creating a schism between the two chambers. Sen. James Lankford, R-Okla., said it was "not rational" to expect the closely divided Senate to pass a bill that

didn't gain a single Democratic vote in the House. "You can't make law like that," Lankford said. "We have to make law." So far, the Senate negotiations have centered on a proposal to raise the initial threshold for migrants to enter the asylum system, as well as limiting the executive branch's ability to admit migrants through humanitarian parole. Democrats took a step back from the talks earlier this week, saying that Republicans were unwilling to compromise. Republican senators are making a counter-offer, but still say they will block the funding package if it does not include border security policy they can agree on. Before the test vote, Schumer made Republicans what he called a "golden offer": agree to move ahead with the aid package and they could offer any amendment they want to add border security to the package. But McConnell, the Republican leader, showed no interest and is encouraging all Republican senators to vote against advancing the Biden aid package to show they

are "serious" in demanding border changes. "Now is the time to pay attention to our own border in addition to these other important international concerns," McConnell said. House lawmakers were also set to hear from national security adviser Jake Sullivan about the urgency of providing assistance. Republicans in the House remain deeply skeptical of sending more wartime funding to Ukraine, and some have said they won't support it even if it is paired with hard-line border policy. The White House has declined to discuss publicly the details of the border negotiations and urged lawmakers to pass Biden's emergency funding request expeditiously. "I think that the president has been very, very clear and senior administration officials will be very clear to every single member of the House and Senate today about what the stakes are in Ukraine at this moment," Olivia Dalton, the White House principal deputy press secretary, said Tuesday on Air Force One while Biden traveled to Boston for campaign fundraisers. □



FILE - Paul Whelan, a former U.S. Marine who was arrested for alleged spying, listens to the verdict in a courtroom at the Moscow City Court in Moscow, Russia, June 15, 2020. The Biden administration says its made a new and significant offer aimed at securing the release of American detainees Paul Whelan and Evan Gershkovich, but Russia has rejected the offer.
(Sofia Sandurskaya, Moscow News Agency photo via AP, File)

US made offer to bring home jailed Americans Paul Whelan and Evan Gershkovich. Russia rejected it

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Biden administration has made a new and significant offer aimed at securing the release of American detainees Paul Whelan and Evan Gershkovich, but Russia has rejected the offer, the State Department said Tuesday. Spokesman Matthew Miller did not reveal the details of the offer nor why Russia had turned it down, but the revelation of the proposal was a fresh indication that

Washington is continuing to try to negotiate with Moscow to get both men home. "This was a new proposal, in recent weeks. It was a significant proposal," Miller said. "And it was rejected by the Russians but it does not, it will not deter us from continuing to do everything we can to try and bring both of them home." The U.S. government has declared both Whelan and Gershkovich to be wrongfully detained.

Whelan, a corporate security executive from Michigan, has been jailed in Russia since his December 2018 arrest on espionage-related charges that both he and the U.S. government dispute. He was sentenced to 16 years in prison. Gershkovich, a Wall Street Journal reporter, was detained in March while on a reporting trip to the Russian city of Yekaterinburg, about 2,000 kilometers (1,200 miles) east of Moscow. □

Illinois scraps plan for building migrant winter camp due to toxic soil risk

By CLAIRE SAVAGE and
MELISSA PEREZ WINDER
Associated Press/Report for
America

CHICAGO (AP) — Gov. J.B. Pritzker's administration announced Tuesday that it is scrapping plans for a temporary winter camp for migrants in Chicago, citing the risk of contaminants at the former industrial site.

The setback comes as Chicago struggles to house more than 24,000 migrants arriving from the border with Mexico since August of last year, most in buses sent by Texas Gov. Greg Abbott, according to city data released Tuesday. With the coldest weather looming — and despite a partnership with religious leaders to provide temporary housing — hundreds of asylum-seekers still await placement at airports and police stations, some of them still camped on sidewalks outside precinct buildings.

Responding to the urgent need, the state put up \$65 million for a tent camp in Brighton Park designed to hold 2,000, and for permanent structures at a 200-bed site in the Little Village neighborhood giving priority to families and people with disabilities.

Construction at the Brighton Park site began last week despite residents' protests that the 9-acre (3.6-hectare) property is polluted and would risk the health of any migrants housed there.

According to an environmental report released Friday that identified contaminants, the site was previously home to a railyard with tanks and oil houses, a zinc smelter and truck trailer parking.

The city released a study late Friday from consultant Terracon that detailed the discovery and removal of sections of soil from the Brighton Park site that contained higher-than-expected levels of mercury and other contaminants.

Mayor Brandon Johnson's office gave assurances Monday, based on Terracon's findings, that the shelter site was safe for temporary residential use. That was before Pritzker's office pulled the plug on it after the Illinois



- FILE - Construction of a government-run tent encampment for migrants is underway, Monday Dec. 4, 2023, in the Brighton Park neighborhood of Chicago. Gov. J.B. Pritzker's administration on Tuesday, Dec. 5 announced it is scrapping construction of the temporary winter camp for migrants, citing the risk of contaminants at the former industrial site.

(AP Photo/Erin Hooley, file)

Environmental Protection Agency reviewed the nearly 800-page environmental report. By then, several large white tents outfitted with HVAC units had already been erected there.

"My administration is committed to keeping asylum seekers safe as we work to help them achieve independence," Pritzker said in a statement. "We will not proceed with housing families on a site where serious environmental concerns are still present."

The Illinois Environmental Protection Agency concluded that more testing was needed to ensure the site was safe.

"The well-being of residents and workers at the site is our highest priority, and current and planned site conditions do not adequately reduce risks of human exposure to known and potential environmental conditions," said Illinois EPA Director John J. Kim.

Alderdwoman Julia Ramirez, the City Council representative for the ward hosting the site, opposed the project over safety concerns.

"I am glad that the Governor's office decided not to continue using this lot for shelter and made sure that we are stepping up to the responsibility of caring for the health of immigrant families and residents," she said, adding the search for safe shelter must continue. Construction was halted Monday while the state's environmental agency evaluated the report, which

compiled laboratory results assessing the site's soil, groundwater, and soil gas. An analysis found excess lev-



Yimara Pajaro of Venezuela carries cots into the Chicago City Life Center, Nov. 29, 2023, in Chicago. Gov. J.B. Pritzker's administration on Tuesday, Dec. 5 announced it is scrapping construction of the temporary winter camp for migrants, citing the risk of contaminants at the former industrial site.

(AP Photo/Erin Hooley)

els of mercury, four metals, DEHP — a chemical present in plastic products — and two semivolatile organic

compounds (SVOCs), which can be found in pesticides, oil-based products, and fire retardants. □

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Senate approves hundreds of military promotions after Republican senator ends blockade of nominees

By KEVIN FREKING
Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Senate in a single stroke Tuesday approved about 425 military promotions after Sen. Tommy Tuberville of Alabama ended a month-long blockade of nominations over his opposition to a Pentagon abortion policy.

Tuberville had been under pressure from members of both sides of the political aisle to end his holds as senators complained about the toll it was taking on service members and their families, and on military readiness.

"Thank God, these military officers will now get the promotion they so rightfully earned," said Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y.

The action came hours after Tuberville said Tuesday he's "not going to hold the promotions of these people any longer." He said holds would continue, however, for about 11 of the highest-ranking military officers, those who would be promoted to what he described as the four-star level or above.

There were 451 military officers affected by the holds



FILE - Sen. Tommy Tuberville, R-Ala., a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, talks to reporters as he and other senators arrive at the chamber for votes, at the Capitol in Washington, Wednesday, Sept. 6, 2023. Tuberville announced on Tuesday, Dec. 5, that he's ending his blockade of hundreds of military promotions, following heavy criticism from many of his colleagues in the Senate and clearing the way for hundreds to be approved.

(AP Photo/J. Scott Applewhite, File)

as of Nov. 27. It's a stance that has left key national security positions unfilled and military families with an uncertain path forward. Tuberville was blocking the nominations in opposition to Pentagon rules that allow travel reimbursement when a service member has to go out of state to get an abortion or other reproductive care. President

Joe Biden's administration instituted the new rules after the Supreme Court overturned the nationwide right to an abortion, and some states have limited or banned the procedure.

"Well, certainly we're encouraged by the news," Pentagon spokesman Brig. Gen. Pat Ryder said at a briefing Tuesday. "We continue to stay engaged with

Senator Tuberville in the Senate directly, to urge that all holds on all our general flag officer nominations be lifted."

Critics said that Tuberville's tactics were a mistake because he was blocking the promotions of people who had nothing to do with the policy he opposed.

"Why are we punishing American heroes who have

nothing to with the dispute?" said Sen. Dan Sullivan, R-Alaska. "Remember, we are against the Biden abortion travel policy. But why are we punishing people who have nothing to do with the dispute and if they get confirmed can't fix it? No one has had an answer for that question because there is no answer."

For months, many of the military officers directly impacted by Tuberville's holds declined to speak out, for fear any comments would be seen as political. But as the pressures on their lives and the lives of the officers serving under them increased, they began to speak about how not being able to resettle their families in new communities was impacting not only them, but their military kids and spouses.

They talked about how some of their most talented junior officers were going to get out of the military because of the instability they saw around them, and they talked about how having to perform multiple roles because of so many vacancies was putting enormous additional stress on an already overworked military community. □

DeSantis wants to cut 1,000 jobs, but asks for \$1 million to sue over Florida State's football snub



FILE - Republican presidential candidate Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis speaks during the Family Leader's Thanksgiving Family Forum, Friday, Nov. 17, 2023, in Des Moines, Iowa. DeSantis on Tuesday, Dec. 5, 2023, recommended Florida eliminate more than 1,000 state jobs in a spending proposal released Tuesday that cuts the current budget by more \$4.6 billion while maintaining popular sales tax holidays.

(AP Photo/Charlie Neibergall, File)

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (AP) — Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis recommended Florida eliminate more than 1,000 state jobs in a spending proposal released Tuesday that cuts the current budget by more \$4.6 billion while maintaining popular sales tax holidays. DeSantis is calling for a \$114.4 billion budget. Unlike most years, the presidential candidate announced his budget far from the state Capitol in a news conference held at a charter school on Marco Island in southwest Florida.

Instead of detailing what jobs he wants cut, DeSantis

spent more time highlighting past achievements and lamenting the decision to exclude the undefeated Florida State University Seminoles from the college football championship playoff. DeSantis said he is asking for \$1 million to let FSU sue the College Football Playoff committee even though the championship will be decided months before a budget is approved.

"My first-grader, my fifth-grader and my preschooler ... they are all 'noles and they are big-time fans and they do the tomahawk chop and they were not happy," DeSantis said.

"We are going to set aside \$1 million and let the chips fall where they may."

DeSantis is also recommending more than \$1 billion in tax cuts, including a repeat of sales tax holidays for school and hurricane supplies and for recreation activities.

DeSantis' recommendation is simply a suggestion to the Legislature, which will begin its annual session next month.

Once the Legislature agrees on a spending plan, DeSantis will have power to veto individual items.

Senior EU official warns of huge security risk in Europe over Christmas as Israel-Hamas war rages

By **LORNE COOK**
Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — Europe faces a "huge risk of terrorist attacks" over the Christmas holiday period due to the fallout from the war between Israel and the Palestinian militant group Hamas, the European Union's home affairs commissioner warned Tuesday. The warning came as French investigators probe a fatal weekend attack near the Eiffel Tower in Paris. Questions were raised about the mental health of the suspect, who swore allegiance to the extremist Islamic State group before stabbing a tourist to death and injuring two other people with a hammer.

"With the war between Israel and Hamas, and the polarization it causes in our society, with the upcoming holiday season, there is a huge risk of terrorist attacks in the European Union," EU Home Affairs Commissioner Ylva Johansson told reporters.

"We saw (it happening) recently in Paris, unfortunately we have seen it earlier as well," she said, as EU interior ministers gathered in Brussels. She provided no details about any police or security information that



French gendarmes patrol the Trocadero plaza near the Eiffel Tower after a man targeted passersbys late Saturday, killing a German tourist with a knife and injuring two others in Paris, Sunday, Dec. 3, 2023. Police subdued the man, a 25-year-old French citizen who had spent four years in prison for a violent offense. After his arrest, he expressed anguish about Muslims dying, notably in the Palestinian territories.

(AP Photo/Christophe Ena)

might have led to her warning.

The fallout from Hamas' attacks in southern Israel on Oct. 7, which killed about 1,200 people, and the ongoing Israeli military response that health officials in Gaza say has killed at least 15,890 Palestinians, has spread to Europe.

In several European capitals in recent weeks, tens of thousands of people have

staged pro-Palestinian rallies and also marched in support of Israel and against rising antisemitism. Pressed repeatedly by reporters after the meeting, Johansson said that she drew the threat conclusion herself based on the high security levels in some of the 27 EU member countries and an increase in reports of antisemitic incidents, as well as more hate

speech and extremist content online.

"Taking all this together, I do the assessment that yes, the threat is significant," she said. She declined to offer any security advice to shoppers over the festive season or people going to Christmas markets, saying that this was the responsibility of national governments.

Johansson, whose brief in-

cludes security and immigration, said the European Commission will provide an additional 30 million euros (\$32.5 million) to bolster security in vulnerable areas, notably places of worship. German Interior Minister Nancy Faeser sent her condolences to France over the weekend attack and said it highlights "just how acute and how serious the threat posed by Islamist terrorism is currently in the EU." "The war in Gaza and Hamas' terror are exacerbating this situation," she told reporters.

Faeser said she had spoken with her counterparts from Austria, Belgium, France, Spain and Sweden about the risks.

"Our security agencies are working very closely together. We must keep a particularly close eye on the Islamist threats right now and take action against Islamist propaganda together with neighboring countries," she said. A 15-year-old boy and an alleged accomplice were accused last week of plotting to blow up a small truck at a Christmas market in the west of Germany in an attack modeled on the methods of the Islamic State group, prosecutors said. □

Dutch government pledges nearly \$2.7 billion for Ukraine in 2024 as war drags into another winter

By **SAMYA KULLAB and HANNA ARHIROVA**
Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — The Netherlands announced Tuesday it would support Ukraine in 2024 with a 2.5 billion euros (nearly \$2.7 billion) allocation, as the 21-month war drags into another winter and concerns grow that Kyiv's war effort may falter without continued Western support.

Dutch Foreign Minister Hanke Bruins Slot announced the allocation during a visit to Ukraine. "Be assured of our support," she said at a press conference after a meeting with her Ukrainian counter-

part, Dmytro Kuleba. "Your security is our security."

Bruins Slot said her country opened a training center for F-16s in Romania on Nov. 13 and is working with the U.S., Denmark and other countries to see that Ukraine can deploy the fighter jets as soon as possible.

She added that the meeting also touched on Ukraine's aspiration to become a member of the European Union: "Your future is with us," she said.

Kuleba said that while media attention has focused on conflict in the Middle East, "political attention" has not diverted from Ukraine.

He said the NATO ministerial meeting last week was positive and "the overall mood in the room was that the support will continue and will even be increased."

The Biden administration wants Congress to approve the White House's nearly \$106 billion funding request for the wars in Ukraine and Israel and other security needs. Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy was scheduled to address U.S. senators by video Tuesday, but had to cancel his appearance, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said.

On the ground, meanwhile,

Russian artillery struck the southern Ukrainian city of Kherson on Tuesday morning, local officials said, killing at least two people in the street.

Russian attacks on the Dnieper River port city have become routine since the Ukrainian army liberated it last year, with civilian deaths reported almost daily. Russian authorities said they repelled another heavy Ukrainian drone attack on Crimea, while Ukraine officials said air defenses responded to drones and missiles launched by the Kremlin's forces.

The Russian Defense Ministry

said air defenses destroyed 22 Ukrainian drones and intercepted 13 more over Crimea and the Sea of Azov early Tuesday. It later added that another four drones were destroyed and two were intercepted.

Russian officials commonly say drones were destroyed when they were shot down and that they were intercepted when electronic jamming is used.

Military and logistics sites in Russian-occupied Crimea, annexed by Moscow in 2014, have been a frequent target for Ukraine since the full-scale invasion in February 2022. □

Mexico halts deportations and migrant transfers citing lack of funds

By **MARÍA VERZA**

Associated Press

MEXICO CITY (AP) — The head of Mexico's immigration agency has ordered the suspension of migrant deportations and transfers due to a lack of funds amid a record-setting year for migration through the country's territory.

The suspensions were outlined in an agency memo dated Dec. 1 from director Francisco Garduño, whose authenticity was confirmed to the Associated Press by an agency official who requested anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss it.

Mexico's finance ministry suspended payments to the National Immigration Institute in November due to end-of-year budget adjustments, according to the memo.

Citing budget constraints "and the lack of liquidity to cover commitments," Garduño ordered a halt to various agency activities, most notably the "assisted returns," a government euphemism to describe deportations, and "ground transportation for transfer



Migrants block the highway during their caravan through Huixtla, Mexico, Wednesday, Nov. 8, 2023. About 3,000 migrants, mostly from Central America, are protesting for the government to issue them temporary documents allowing them to continue north to the U.S. border.

(AP Photo/Edgar Clemente)

of irregular migrants."

Mexico's government had been frequently moving migrants from points north near the U.S. border to locations in the south in part to relieve pressure on border cities, but also to exhaust migrants, according to advocates.

Mexico has recorded nearly 590,000 undocumented migrants in its territory this year, a significant increase compared to 440,000 in all of last year and fewer than 310,000 in 2021, according to government data.

Mexico has already deported far fewer migrants this

year than in recent years. From January to October, the government deported 51,000 migrants, compared to nearly 122,000 in all of last year and more than 130,000 in 2021.

Deportations had precipitously dropped in April following a fire at a migrant

detention center in Ciudad Juarez, across the border from El Paso, Texas.

The fire killed 40 migrants and injured 27 more. The tragedy threw the immigration agency into chaos and it temporarily closed dozens of its detention centers. Garduño and seven other officials face criminal charges related to the deadly fire. Six of them were charged with homicide.

Deportations had just picked up again in October, when Mexico began sending migrants back to their countries, including flights to Cuba and Venezuela.

With the halt to funding, "Mexico is likely to rely more heavily on National Guard soldiers for migration management, a mission that they are barely prepared to fulfill," said Adam Isacson, an immigration analyst with the Washington Office on Latin America.

"The result is likely to be a sharp decline in Mexico's migrant apprehensions during December, and migrants may have a modestly easier time than usual reaching the U.S. border." □

North Korea accuses US of double standards for letting South Korea launch spy satellite from US soil



In this photo provided by South Korea Defense Ministry, the third test flight of solid-fuel space rocket is launched from a barge in waters near Jeju Island, South Korea, Monday, Dec. 4, 2023.

(South Korea Defense Ministry via AP)

By **HYUNG-JIN KIM**

Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korea on Monday ac-

cused the United States of double standards, slamming it for letting rival South Korea launch a spy satellite from U.S. territory after condemning the North's earlier satellite launch.

Last Friday, South Korea launched its first domestically built spy satellite into space from California's Vandenberg Space Force Base. That came after North Korea put its own military spy satellite into orbit for the first time on Nov. 21.

Unlike the South Korean launch, North Korea's satellite liftoff drew immediate, strong rebukes from Washington, Seoul and their partners because it violated U.N. Security Council resolutions. The world body views any North Korean launch using ballistic technology as a cover for testing its missile technology.

North Korea maintains it has the right to launch satellites and test missiles in the face of what it calls U.S.-led military threats.

"It is a space-level tragicomedy that the U.S., going frantic with illegal denunciation and sanctions moves over the exercise of (North Korea's) sovereignty, has shown behavior based on double standards by launching a spy satellite of (South Korea) in a shameless manner," an unidentified spokesperson for the North's National Aerospace Technology Administration said in a statement. The statement said if "the gangster-like logic of the U.S. ... is connived and tolerated, global peace and stability will be exposed to an irrevocable grave danger."

North Korea has said its spy satellite transmitted imag-

ery with space views of key sites in the U.S. and South Korea, including the White House and the Pentagon. But it hasn't yet released any of those satellite photos. Many outside experts question whether it can send militarily useful high-resolution imagery.

North Korea has said it'll launch additional spy satellites to better monitor its rivals' moves and enhance the precision-guided strike capability of its missiles.

South Korea also plans to launch four more spy satellites by 2025 under a contract with SpaceX. The establishment of its own space-based surveillance network would ease its dependence on U.S. spy satellites to monitor strategic facilities in North Korea. Experts say launching a satellite aboard a SpaceX rocket

is more economical and that South Korea also needs more tests to ensure the reliability of a launch rocket.

Earlier Monday, South Korea conducted a third test flight for a solid-fuel rocket near its southern Jeju island, according to the South's Defense Ministry. A ministry statement said the launch was successful and put a civilian commercial satellite into orbit.

Solid-fuel rockets require shorter launch times and cheaper development and manufacturing costs than liquid-fuel rockets. Experts say solid-fuel rockets are used to launch smaller spy satellite because they have weaker thrust force than similar-sized liquid-fuel rockets. They say the development of solid-fuel rockets can help improve South Korea's missile technology as well. □



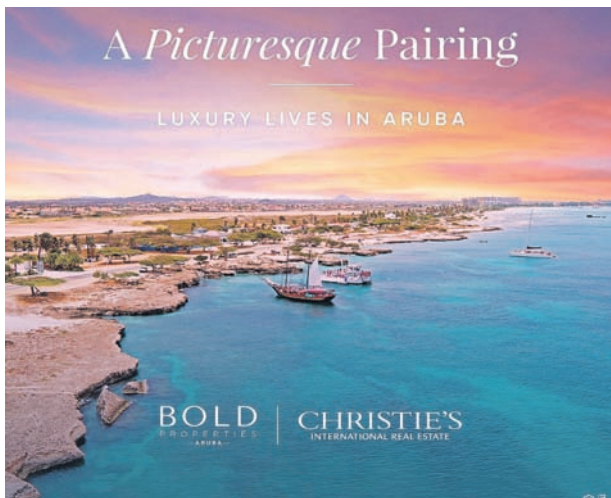
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Investing in Paradise: Aruba's Real Estate Market Offers Golden Opportunities



Aruba, often referred to as the "One Happy Island," is not just a picturesque tropical getaway; it's also a promising destination for real estate investment. With its stunning beaches, stable political environment, and strong tourism industry, Aruba is attracting investors from around the world. If you're considering investing in Aruba's real estate market, you'll want to get in touch with experts like Jenniffer Figaroa from Bold Properties Aruba and Christie's International Real Estate for exceptional guidance in the buying process.

Aruba's Real Estate Market Overview:

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- Tourism Boom:** Aruba's tourism industry is a significant driver of the local economy. The island enjoys a high number of tourists, with its pristine beaches, year-round sunny weather, and vibrant culture attracting visitors from all corners of the globe. This means excellent potential for vacation rental income.
- Stable Political Environment:** Aruba is part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, which ensures a stable political environment and reliable legal framework for property ownership. Foreign investors are welcomed and enjoy equal property rights.
- Tax Benefits:** Aruba offers tax incentives for real estate investors, including exemptions on capital gains tax and property tax for a specific period.
- Residency Options:** Investing in Aruba can also pave the way for obtaining residency through various visa programs designed to attract investors and retirees.

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Locals and visitors enjoy the guided ostrich tour at the farm and features a well-stocked locally crafted and produced Art Boutique. The highlight of the visit is always the fun interaction with the resident ostriches and emus,

including a trip to the incubators and the bird kindergarten, housing baby ostriches, baby emus, chicken and ducks, and even a land turtle!

It was a National Geographic moment when on cue Mr. Ostrich flapped his wings excitedly and poked around the ground with his bill, triggering Mrs. Ostrich who ran around in circles, flapped her wings and also poked around, before collapsing on the ground in a heap of feathers, allowing him to mount her, shaking, winding and spiraling his head in all direction!

Mr. Ostrich concluded his unexpected performance with a loud honking, his eyes rolling, then got up in a huff to nonchalantly strut away, leaving his wife and the scrutiny of our cameras.

It was a surprise reality TV moment, and not usually included in the regular program. Feeding the Ostriches is however always on the program, and they are eternally hungry, and fun!



Tours are available daily every half hour from 10– 3pm. No reservations needed for small groups.

Matividiri 57, Open daily
from 10:00 AM till 4:00 PM
Telephone: 5859630
For more information go to the website:
www.arubaostrichfarm.com

The Bushiribana Gold Mill Ruins and its history

(Oranjestad)—The Bushiribana Gold Mill Ruins is one of the most visited places by tourists on the island, as it lies along the northern coast line near the mini pool and on the way to the Natural Bridge. Despite its seemingly plain appearance, this ruin represents one of the most important histories of the island: The Aruban Gold Rush.

Built in 1872 by English company Aruba Island Gold Mining Company Ltd, the gold mill at Bushiribana was constructed in the area where most gold was found by locals. The story of gold on Aruba actually dates back to 1725, when a first exploration for gold on the island was commissioned by the Dutch West India Company. Under the leadership of Mr. Paulus Printz, a three-year search was conducted on Aruba, to no avail. Though they



found some gold, it was enough to motivate a further search, and the assignment was discontinued by Printz himself.

It wasn't until 100 years later, in 1824, when a young boy found a lump of gold while out herding his father's sheep. His father took it to a local merchant who

then sold the lump for \$70. Unbeknownst to the boy and his father, they quite literally struck gold, and as word got out, a gold fever spread among the locals who started searching for more gold. About 25 pounds worth was found.

At the same time, the Aruban government took

immediate actions, and informed Curacao that gold was found. At first, everyone could look for gold, as long as they sold it to the government. However, after some time, the government decided to implement stricter rules and banned local search parties.

Over the years, concession-holding had seen different companies from around the world, all of which used primitive methods to dig and carve out gold from the rocks. Aruba Island Gold Mining Company Ltd. was no different, but used a unique method that involved grinding the rocks and letting the dust be blown away by the strong northeast wind, leaving clumps of gold behind. The next step was melting the gold and letting it attach to quicksilver in order to obtain pure gold. All these processes were done at the Bushiribana Gold Mill.

The gold mill itself had a short life-span: only 10 years in service, but its structure remained relatively solid till this day, and is now a historical remnant.

Sources: Etnia Nativa & gold-mineranch.com.

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Hungry Piranha - Pizza, Wings & More | Twist of Flavors
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Magnet Perfume Jewelry & Cosmetics | Curated Lab

Visit the historic museum at Fort Zoutman!

(Oranjestad)—Located in the middle of downtown Oranjestad, situated right next to the government building "Cocolishi", is one of the oldest buildings of Aruba: Fort Zoutman. First constructed in 1796, this site has been used (or left unused) in many ways and have survived eras of war and attempted dismantling.

When anyone refers to Fort Zoutman, they are actually referring to two separate buildings that, over the years, have been merged: the fort and the tower. That's right, the iconic 5-story, squared tower was

not part of the original structure of the fort, and is actually called "Willem III Toren". Constructed in 1867, this tower was named after the then-reigning king of The Netherlands, Willem III. Willem III Toren was originally a light tower, but after a request from Lieutenant Governor Jan Helenus in 1866, it also became a bell tower.

The fort itself was originally constructed to protect the commerce bay of Paardenbaai from pirates and other disreputable characters roaming the Caribbean Sea. Unlike the Willem III Toren, Fort Zout-

man had a more tumultuous past, including the on-and-off reception of unwanted members of the English military several times (The Netherlands was at constant war with England back in the colonial era). Over the years, both the fort and the tower had functioned as different government center points, including a tax and stamps office. For some time these two buildings also housed a police precinct and jail, and even experienced abandonment until the Cultural Center Aruba Foundation (CCA) petitioned for its renovation in 1964, turning the site into



the Historic Museum it currently is.

Despite its small size, The Historic Museum guards a rich depository of the commercial, military and social history of Oranjestad, offering a glance into how the social culture of the town came to be. If you are interested in history and want

to learn more about Aruba, then Fort Zoutman should definitely be included into your itinerary.

The museum is open Monday to Friday from 9am-6pm, and Saturday from 10am-2pm. □

**Source: The Old Fort of Aruba
by Jan Hartog.**

Fresh fish right out of the Caribbean Sea to your plate



ORANJESTAD – Fish restaurants are everywhere, but do they serve fresh fish daily right out of the Caribbean Sea? The Grand Fish Restaurant does. This locally-owned restaurant is situated merely 5 minutes from the strip and is open as early as 11am for the lunch lovers.

The minute you step inside you can feel the homey and cozy warm ambiance by the décor and the friendly staff who will receive you with open arms.

The Grand Fish Restaurant has an extraordinary menu starting with appetizers, salads and their famous fish soup. The entree dishes consist of a variety of fresh fish like whole red snapper, fish steak, fish cake, grilled salmon, mixed seafood or seafood rice (paella local style) combined with sides of vegetables, french fries, rice, plantain, the island's traditional 'pan bati' (slapped bread) or funchi (cornmeal cake).

Each and every dish is made with passion, love and dedication. Yes... even the fried ones!

There are also pasta, meat and poultry options plus a kid-friendly menu with crispy chicken or fish nuggets, cheese



burgers, mac & cheese and kid tenderloin.

Pair your meal with your favorite drink or cocktail, a wine of your choice or a glass of The Grand Fish yummy homemade fresh lemonade.

If you haven't visited The Grand Fish yet, check out our local page for a coupon for a free glass of wine and make sure to drop by. The staff will be happy to welcome, guide and serve you for an amazing casual bite and good time.

The Grand Fish Restaurant is situated at Taratata Road 15, unit #1.

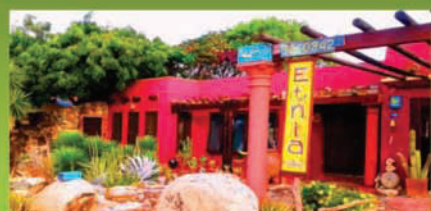
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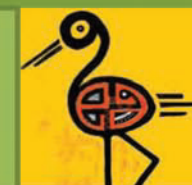
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Article by Etnia Nativa

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Guano, seabirds poop

Episode CCXXXV- 235

Each week, Etnia Nativa presents a new episode about cultural heritage, focusing on native knowledge, transcendental wisdom, and the importance of defending the true heart of Aruba. It connects the reader to that mystical aspect of the island's culture and traditions, encouraging everyone to interact with our unique environment. In this episode, it talks about guano, a highly appreciated product in organic farming.

Guano is a word extracted from the Quechua language of the Incas, wánu, which stands for compost or fertilizer. It is the substrate resulting from the massive accumulation of excrement from bats, seabirds, and seals in arid or low-humidity environments. Bird guano usually refers to the desiccated droppings of seabirds. Thanks to the fish diet of these birds, their guano is a highly effective fertilizer for plants and soil since it is packed with phosphorus, potassium, carbon, and nitrogen. Phosphorus (P) is especially important for root and bloom development; potassium (K) supports photosynthesis and is all about growth. Carbon (C) and nitrogen (N) are essential foods for all plants, and nitrogen is also responsible for supporting foliage growth.

During the 20th century, guano-producing birds became an important conservation target, but before this, in the 1800s, the guano trade played a key role in the development of intensive agricultural practices and led to the formal colonization of remote islands around the world.

In the early 19th century, due to the extensive use of American farmland, soil nutrients were greatly depleted. Farmers began to look for better fertilizers. It was in the year 1882 that guano became an important income source for our island; it turned Aruba into the main support of the islands, a situation that remained until the establishment of the oil industry. (See episode 41: Aruba Phosphate Company.) To transport the



guano to the port, a six-kilometer-long railway was built, from which it was shipped to England, France, Germany, and the United States to process it and so obtain a superphosphate that was used as fertilizer.

Two hundred years ago, commercial fertilizers were rarely used. Farmers relied on manure, bones, and ashes to supplement the soil, but why those materials were beneficial was not fully understood. Meanwhile, a stinking substance discovered by the Incas of South America, known as bird guano, was beginning to re-emerge as the leading agricultural fertilizer in the United States.

When American farmers discovered that guano was a great fertilizer, agricultural production increased greatly, and they became eager for it, but the prices set by the Peruvian government were increasingly higher. Peruvian guano became popular in the United States, and although guano was sought on other Pacific and Caribbean islands, it was of lower quality because the rain on these islands had sapped the guano of its nitrates, an essential ingredient in agricultural fertilizer. By the 1830s, the first American ships mined guano from a group of islands off the coast of Peru called the Chincha Islands. Due to the dry climate of the Chincha Islands, its guano was high in nitrates, making it the finest in the world.

The guano trade was more dangerous than it seemed because, as the guano dust filled the air with ammonia, those in contact with it were exposed to toxic and asphyxiating vapors.

In 1856, the U.S. government passed the Guano Islands Act, which allowed any unclaimed or unoccupied islands containing guano to be annexed. This act was originally intended for Americans to acquire their own Guano Islands and was one of the founding acts of American imperialism. (Source of this paragraph: National Museum of American History online.) Other guano islands were found in the Caribbean, such as Navassa Island, and some in the Pacific, including Baker and Jarvis islands, although none compared to the Peruvian guano.

Aruba's dry climate favored it becoming a guano island, with millions of birds flying on its coasts that sustained a productive pile for years in the 19th century. Did you notice that coastal rocks are favorite "toilet spots" for pelicans and many other seabirds?

So if you are interested in really getting to know the flora, fauna, geology, history, and autochthonous art, as well as the true identity of the island, book a visit to Etnia Nativa, a unique native gem! Let Anthony, our acclaimed columnist, guide and lecture you regarding the most interesting and revealing stories about Aruba's undiscovered native ethnicity, an adventure beyond beaches and tourist traps. Visit his magnificent dwelling that integrates natural and reused materials, bursting with culture and island heritage, and you'll love our island beyond beaches!

Appointments and confirmations through WhatsApp +297 592 2702 or etnianaativa03@gmail.com



Did you know about... Basic driving rules on Aruba (part 1)

(Oranjestad)—Have you ever felt confused when you're driving on the highways or backstreets of Aruba? Then we present a simple guide to some of the basic rules of Aruban traffic, along with some tips for things to look out for.

Speed limit

Legally, the speed limit on the four-lane highways is 80 km/h. This speed limit also counts for the main roads that are connected to the highways. The minimum speed is 50 km/h. Most people drive around 60 km/h on the main roads and about 70 km/h on the highways. There are also areas that indicate a speed limit on a sign; these are usually around populated and school areas.

The four-lane highways contain the left-lane, also known as the "fast" lane for each direction. Here is where vehicles can drive up to the maximum speed. However, legally it is not permitted to drive for long periods of time on the left lane. This lane is primarily designed for drivers to switch lanes before a roundabout, for example, if your exit on the roundabout is on your far left. The general lane to drive in—both at maximum and minimum speed—is on the right lane.



Roundabouts

Speaking of roundabouts, it is important to know where you have to enter and drive on the roundabout to make your exit. A good rule of thumb is to count the exits starting from your right side. So, exit 1 would be on your right; exit 2 would be straight ahead; exit 3 would be on your far left and exit 4 would lead to the road paralleled to the one you're on, heading in the other direction.

Most roundabouts have these 4 exits, so they are relatively simple. When you're driving on the four-lane highway, it is important to know when to switch to

the left lane to make your exit: if your exit is on your far left (exit 3), then you need to switch to the left lane on the highway before nearing the roundabout so you can take the path that leads you directly to your exit. If your exit is on your right or if you're going straight ahead, you can keep driving in the right lane of the highway.

It's also important to know that vehicles about to enter the roundabout must yield to those already on it. A good rule of thumb is to look out if someone is coming from your left side.

However, other roundabouts can be quite tricky

to navigate...

Watty Vos Boulevard (the "paperclip" roundabout)

Probably the biggest roundabout on the island, the "paperclip" roundabout on the Watty Vos Boulevard is one of the trickier roundabouts that could—and has—caused confused among both tourists and locals. However, once you take a good look at it, it's fairly simple. The basis is just the same as a regular roundabout (left exit? left lane! etc.), but instead of having four different exits like on a regular roundabout, now you have two extra; one on the right and the other on the left side of the roundabout. The rules don't change at all, you just have to keep an extra eye open.

Airport roundabout

Ah, yes. The infamous airport roundabout. The favorite roundabout amongst local, because of its easy (hard) lanes that never (always) cause confusion among drivers. Sarcasm aside, this roundabout can be tricky to enter, especially when you're driving from the direction of the airport heading. When you're driving away from the airport reaching the roundabout, you'll be faced with three lanes. The far right lane is to take the exit 1 out heading east (right lane of highway). The middle exit is

used for exit 1 (left lane of highway), 2 and 3. The far left exit is used to only exit on exit 3 (left lane of highway) and 4.

"Las Americas" roundabout

The Las Americas roundabout is located near the Talk of the Town hotel, west from the airport roundabout. This roundabout may look like a regular roundabout—and for the most part, it is. However, when you are driving from the east going in the direction of town, please take note that there are two exits on your right.

When you're driving towards this roundabout, you'll notice that the road becomes wider, splitting into two lanes. The right lane is used to take the first and second exit on the right. If you want to exit straight ahead, you must drive on the left lane!

It's always scary to drive in new places where the traffic may look and work differently, but once you get it right once, you'll get the hang of it in no time. Additionally, all roundabouts and roads on Aruba have signs and arrows painted on the road to help guide you. So take your time, keep your eyes open and don't forget to wear a seat belt! □



CROSSWORD

By THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 School course
- 5 Third-party account
- 11 Pale tan
- 12 Horse-related
- 13 Clothing line
- 14 Mas-saged
- 15 Nile serpent
- 16 "Buenos —"
- 17 Tribal leader
- 19 Reservoir maker
- 22 Stunned states
- 24 Marry in haste
- 26 A party to
- 27 Concept
- 28 Early computer
- 30 Wave's top
- 31 Baseball's Williams
- 32 Writer Asimov
- 34 Made a sketch
- 35 Drama division
- 38 Ill will
- 41 Like an eyesore
- 42 Ancient
- 43 Shortly

DOWN

- 44 Andy Hardy's portrayer
- 45 Poker payment
- 1 Butte's kin
- 2 Good pair
- 3 Geometric shape
- 4 Engine sound
- 5 Spine-tingling
- 6 Geometric shape
- 7 Chicago team
- 8 Vault part
- 9 Low digit
- 10 Marry
- 16 Dentist's deg.
- 18 Singer Horne

A	C	H	E			B	R	U	C	E
S	H	O	N	E		L	E	T	O	N
H	O	L	D	T	H	E	F	O	R	T
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	S	P	E	N	D		E	A	S	E
			D	E	F	E	R			
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T	R	E		I	T	S		D	I	E
H	O	L	D	T	H	E	L	I	N	E
E	L	V	I	S		D	A	V	I	D
R	E	E	D	Y		P	E	N	S	

Yesterday's answer

- 19 Geometric shape
- 20 Gorillas and gibbons
- 21 Ham or lamb
- 22 Losing scheme
- 23 Writer Rice
- 25 Old Italian coin
- 29 Geometric shape
- 30 Crow call
- 33 Squalid
- 34 Singer Celine
- 36 Artery problem
- 37 TV's Daly
- 38 Spoil
- 39 Before today
- 40 Summer sign
- 41 Much of N. Amer.

1	2	3	4		5	6	7	8	9	10
11					12					
13					14					
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31				32	33					
			34					35	36	37
38	39	40					41			
42							43			
44							45			

12-6

AXYDLBAAXR
is LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

12-6

CRYPTOQUOTE

FQ GJ UJ PCD KGBDR RDZRD
VE VPQ LGRJ, OQUZFR LDGHD
EVQ JVC GX, GZC HQDGJDR G
AURUVZ EVQ JVKVQQVM.

— KDWVCX ODGJJUD

Yesterday's Cryptoquote: FAMILIES ARE LIKE FUDGE — MOSTLY SWEET, WITH A FEW NUTS. — LES DAWSON

Argentina's President-elect Milei replies to Musk's interest: 'We need to talk, Elon'



President-elect Javier Milei waves during a joint session of Congress to officially declare him and his running mate winners of the presidential runoff election, in Buenos Aires, Argentina, Wednesday, Nov. 29, 2023.

(AP Photo/Natacha Pisarenko)

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina (AP) — Elon Musk, the billionaire owner of the social network X, shared a video Tuesday in which Argentina's President-elect Javier Milei says equality should never come before freedom, in a sign of how some notable conservatives are closely watching the incoming libertarian head of state.

"We need to talk, Elon," Milei replied on X, formerly

Twitter.

This is not the first time that Musk, the founder of SpaceX and CEO of Tesla, has expressed support for Milei on social media. "Prosperity is about to come to Argentina," Musk wrote when Milei won the election runoff on Nov. 19.

In the interview excerpt that Musk posted, Milei spoke against efforts to make societies more equal, saying it is far more important for

people to be free.

"There's a sublime phrase by Milton Friedman that I find to be outstanding, which is that when you prioritize equality over freedom, you end up achieving neither. But when you prioritize freedom over equality, you achieve many of both," Milei said in the interview, referring to the American economist who won the Nobel Prize in Economics in 1976.

In the same interview, Milei said that John Stuart Mill, a 19th-century British philosopher, economist and politician, argued that a society that emphasizes equality "ultimately becomes a society of looters and it sinks. That is the history of Argentina."

The president-elect, who takes office on Sunday, also said income redistribution involves "using the repressive apparatus of the state to take from the successful" and distributing it arbitrarily "based on what the person in power wants." □

Grand Theft Auto VI leak followed by an official trailer with a twist: A release date of 2025

NEW YORK (AP) — The highly-anticipated trailer for Grand Theft Auto VI arrived a little early after a copy was leaked online.

Rockstar Games released its first look for the sixth game of the cult-classic video game series Monday evening — roughly 15 hours before the planned Tuesday morning unveiling — while citing the leak.

"Our trailer has leaked so please watch the real thing on YouTube," Rockstar Games wrote on X, the platform formerly known as

Twitter, just after 6 p.m. ET Monday. Rockstar Games and its New York parent company, Take-Two Interactive Software Inc., did not provide further details on the leak. The company did not immediately respond to The Associated Press' requests for comment early Tuesday. Still, avid Grand Theft Auto fans were able to learn a few things from the 90-second teaser — including that the next installment would be set in the Miami-inspired Vice City and star

a female protagonist, a first for the franchise, named Lucia. The end of the video also confirmed that game won't be released until 2025.

That's later than some anticipated — including researchers at Raymond James & Associates. In an early Tuesday brief, Raymond James analysts said that they originally expected Grand Theft Auto VI to arrive in the 2024 holiday season.

Shares of Take-Two Interactive fell about 2% at the opening bell.

While a specific 2025 date hasn't been disclosed from Take-Two yet, industry analyst still predict the game will arrive in the first few months of the year — pointing to the company's "commentary around bookings expectations" of just under \$8 billion for the 2025 fiscal year. □

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Frontier Airlines settles lawsuit filed by pilots who claimed bias over pregnancy, breastfeeding



FILE - A Frontier Airlines jetliner waits on a runway for departure from Denver International Airport, Sept. 1, 2023, in Denver. Frontier Airlines has settled a lawsuit filed on behalf of pilots who said the airline discriminated against pregnant and breastfeeding employees. In the settlement announced Tuesday, Dec. 5, 2023 Frontier will let pilots pump breast milk in the cockpit during "noncritical phases" of flights.

(AP Photo/David Zalubowski, file)

DENVER (AP) — Frontier Airlines has settled a lawsuit filed by female pilots who accused the airline of dis-

criminating against pregnant or breastfeeding employees. In the agreement announced Tuesday, Frontier will let pi-

lots pump breast milk in the cockpit during "noncritical phases" of flights. The Denver-based airline also agreed to let pilots who are breastfeeding reduce their flying time and treat pregnancy and breastfeeding the same as other medical conditions if they make pilots unable to fly. The settlement was announced by the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. The agency lodged charges against Frontier in 2018, after several pilots sued the airline.

Aditi Fruitwala, a lawyer for the American Civil Liberties Union, one of the groups that filed the lawsuit, said

the settlement should send a message to airlines and other employers about making reasonable accommodations to pregnant and breastfeeding employees. Frontier's vice president for labor relations, Jacalyn Peter, said the airline is "at the forefront of accommodating the needs of pregnant and breastfeeding mothers in the airline industry." She said advances in wearable lactation technology made it possible to reach a settlement that maintains safety. □

US officials want ships to anchor farther from California undersea pipelines, citing 2021 oil spill

By **AMY TAXIN**
Associated Press

HUNTINGTON BEACH, Calif.

(AP) — Federal officials on Tuesday recommended increasing the distance from undersea pipelines that vessels are allowed to anchor in Southern California, citing a 2021 oil spill they said was caused by ships whose anchors were dragged across a pipeline after a storm.

The leak occurred in a ruptured pipeline owned by Houston-based Amplify Energy. National Transportation Safety Board officials concluded damage to the pipeline had been caused months earlier when a cold

front brought high winds and seas to the Southern California coast, causing two container vessels that were anchored offshore to drag their anchors across the area where the pipeline was located.

The October 2021 spill of 25,000 gallons (94,600 liters) sent blobs of crude washing ashore in Huntington Beach and nearby communities, shuttered beaches and fisheries, coated birds with oil and threatened area wetlands.

The Beijing and MSC Danit — each measuring more than 1,100 feet (335 meters) long — had displaced and damaged the pipe-

line in January 2021, while a strike from the Danit's anchor caused the eventual crude release, officials said. □

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Editor
Caribbean Speed Printers N.V.
Aruba Bank N.V. Acc. #332668
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Acc. #23951903
RBC Royal Bank Acc. #1330772

Editors

Pilar Flores
Richard Brooks
Angenette Figuereo

Sales

Mark Gomes
Sulaika Croes

Classifieds

classified@cspnv.com

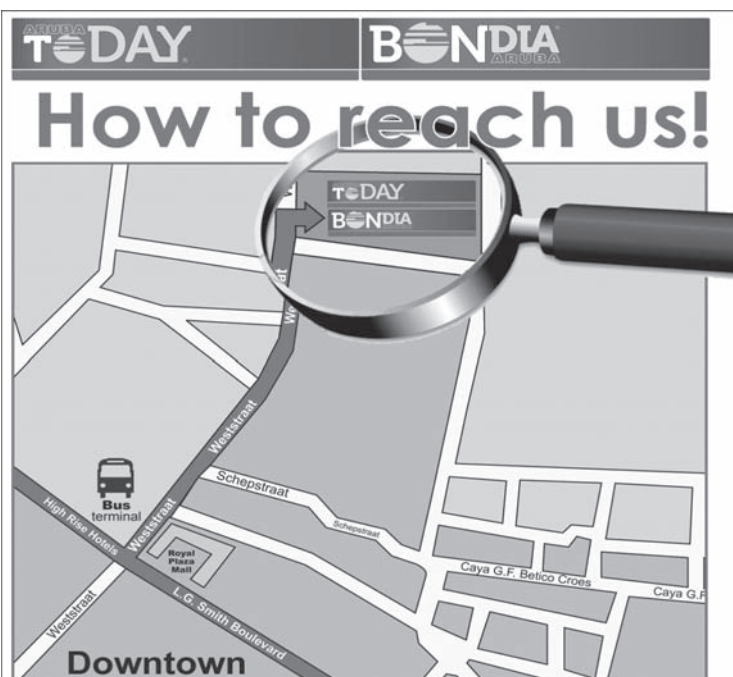
Distribution and Collection

accounting@bondia.com

Social / Website

Juan Luis Pinto

Weststraat 22
T: 582-7800
E: news@arubatoday.com
W: www.arubatoday.com
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A1 Taxi Serv.	280 2828

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Avianca	588 0059
Jet Blue	588 2244
Surinam	582 7896

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Fundacion Contra Violencia
Relacional Tel. 583 5400

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China's government can't take a joke, so comedians living abroad censor themselves

By FU TING

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Comedian Xi Diao says he knows he should avoid talking politics on stage, but sharing a family name with Chinese President Xi Jinping makes it hard to resist. Even his name is politically sensitive, the Melbourne-based amateur comedian tells audiences, setting up a joke about a group chat on the Chinese messaging service WeChat being shut down as soon as he joined it.

The 33-year-old civil engineer gets nervous laughs whenever he breaks a de facto rule of Chinese comedy: Don't say anything that makes China look bad. To most comedians, that means no jokes about censorship, no mentioning the president's name, and no discussion of China's extraordinarily strict COVID lockdowns or social topics like domestic violence.

"It is a pity, if the environment were open, there would be somebody world-class coming up," Xi said. Mandarin-language stand-up comedy is growing, and not just in China. The medium has taken off in the last decade, and China's expatriate population has established clubs in cities like New York, Tokyo and Madrid.

Comedians are known for bristling at limits, but most Mandarin-language comedians, and many fans, say some topics have no place in the comedy club. In China there are censors who review jokes in advance, and punish performers who cross political red lines. Earlier this year, an entertainment company was fined about \$2 million when star comedian Li Haoshi made a joke that referenced a Chinese military slogan.

Overseas, comedians say they don't fear punishment, but most say political jokes aren't funny, or make people uncomfortable. Many are not very familiar with political humor, after growing up in a country that



In this photo provided by comedian Lin Dongxiao, who uses the stage name Guazi, Lin performs standup in Toronto, Saturday, June 10, 2023. Lin moved back to China to pursue a career in standup comedy.

(Courtesy of Lin Dongxiao via AP)

largely censors it.

"We make what the audience likes," said Guo Jia, a businessman who runs a comedy club in Tokyo. He said discomfort with politics is part of Chinese culture, comparing it to sensitivities about race in the United States.

"There are some areas where people won't go, but it's not typically because of government policies, but more social pressure or culture or religion," said Michel Hockx, a professor of Chinese Literature and director of the Liu Institute for Asia and Asian Studies in University of Notre Dame. Comedians do push on social boundaries.

For Lin Dongxiao, a 28-year-old comedian who began performing while living in Toronto, it was a chance to talk in public about a congenital disorder that causes limp, and to get crowds laughing with him about how Chinese society treats people with disabilities.

Lin, who performs under the stage name "Guazi," told an audience that women he met online complained that he didn't warn them he had a disability, so he added it to his dating pro-

file.

"You're scrolling ... oh gym trainer, nice body; business executive, million-dollar salary; and then...third-class certificate of disability without any allowance." People burst into laughter.

Standup fan Wenlai Cai, a Los Angeles-based software engineer in her early 30s, said that she enjoys hearing jokes about LGBTQ life and race relations, topics that are strictly off limits in the mainland.

But "there should be limits on (jokes about) high level politics" Cai said. "That is, political leaders, partisanship ... I don't think it's meaningful to talk about."

There are also a few venues that defy Beijing's sensibilities. Women's Idea, a feminist group in New York City, hosts uncensored comedy shows that often hit on politics, encouraging women to express themselves on social and political issues.

But even roundabout references to politics make most Chinese-language audiences uncomfortable, Xi said. After he performed at a Chinese restaurant in Australia, the owner asked him to be careful; at a standup competition, he

got zero audience votes. He's wound up performing almost exclusively at English-language venues.

Zhu Jiesheng, who runs a standup comedy club in Madrid, reviews other performers' jokes before they go on stage, asking them to strike jokes that could cross political lines.

But when a comedian insisted on telling jokes about the Shanghai lockdown, Zhu didn't stop him. The audience didn't get the jokes, Zhu said, and it started arguments backstage, leaving him more convinced that politics and comedy don't mix.

Comedians are very aware that people can get into trouble for what they say. Asked about Li Haoshi, comedians said he should have known better.

"Even if you do not make mistakes but someone else does, it affects the whole industry," said Zhong Di, a 30-year-old student in Milan who also performs standup. Lin, who recently moved back to China to pursue a career in standup, said the industry is still recovering from the crackdown set off by his joke.

The Associated Press

couldn't reach Li for comment, and the company that manages him didn't respond to an interview request.

China has a record of harassing its nationals abroad for activism. It has also threatened international stars from abroad with boycotts or bans on performing in China. Nigel Ng, a Malaysian comedian based in the UK who created the popular character "Uncle Roger," lost his Chinese social media accounts after a clip from a live show went viral in which he joked about China listening in through cell phones.

Vicky Xu, a Chinese-born journalist in Australia who also performs standup in English, said that Chinese people have a long history of cracking jokes about sensitive topics.

"If you look back at a lot of the movies or TV shows made in China like 20, 30 years ago, there are more political jokes than today. So how do you explain that?" she said.

Xu, whose work is critical of the Chinese government and who has received blistering blowback from China's official media and nationalist trolls, said that politics affects people's lives in China so much that not talking about it is "ignoring the elephant in the room." When comedians go back to China, they face restrictions beyond what they impose on themselves overseas.

Lin said censorship is important to prevent "chaos," but submitting his material to censors weeks before performances is still a challenge.

"No one told me what I could say or not," said Lin, "which is pretty hard. I just hand in whatever I have, and change it if it doesn't get approved."

In Australia, Xi doesn't plan to stop kidding about his famous namesake.

"I'm nobody," Xi said, "and after all, I have an Australian passport ... I will keep telling these jokes." □



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Tokyo Olympics sullied by bid-rigging, bribery trials more than 2 years after the Games closed

By **STEPHEN WADE and YURI KAGEYAMA**
Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — The bid-rigging trial around the Tokyo Olympics played out Tuesday in a Japanese courtroom — more than two years after the Games closed — with advertising giant Dentsu and five other companies facing criminal charges.

Seven individuals are also facing charges from Tokyo district prosecutors in the cases, including Koji Henmi, who oversaw the sports division at Dentsu at the time. Executives or management-level officials at each of the accused companies, and Tokyo Olympic organizing committee official Yasuo Mori, have been charged with violating anti-monopoly laws.

Among the companies facing charges are Dentsu Group, Hakuhodo, Tokyu Agency and event organizer Cerespo. All deal with event organizing, sports promotion or marketing. Dentsu has a long history of lining up sponsorships and advertising with bodies like World Athletics, headed by Sebastian Coe, and the Switzerland-based International Olympic Committee, led by Thomas Bach.

Genta Yoshino, the lawyer for Henmi, did not deny the bid-rigging took place. Speaking in Tokyo district court, he said no bid process was ever decided upon or set up by the Tokyo Olympic organizing committee.

"Even if what happened gets categorized as bid-rigging, all my client did was abide by the organizing committee's intentions, following their instructions," Yoshino told the court, presided over by a panel of



FILE - The headquarters of Japanese advertising company Dentsu Inc. stands in Tokyo on June 5, 2020. The bid-rigging trial around the Tokyo Olympics played out Tuesday, Dec. 5, 2023, in a Japanese courtroom — more than two years after the Games closed — with advertising giant Dentsu and five other companies facing criminal charges.

(AP Photo/Eugene Hoshiko, File)

three judges.

Yoshino said his client merely did his best to make the Olympics a success. Henmi was under pressure from the IOC, which repeatedly expressed doubts about the ability of the Tokyo organizers, Yoshino added. The organizing committee was headed at the time by Yoshiro Mori, a former Japanese prime minister who was eventually forced to resign as the head of Tokyo 2020. The CEO was Toshiro Muto, a former deputy director of the Bank of Japan.

The maximum penalty for a company convicted of bid-rigging is a fine of up to 500 million yen (\$3.3 million). An individual, if found guilty, faces up to five years in prison and a fine of up to 5 million yen (\$33,000).

Trials take months in Japan, sometimes years. The next session in the trial was scheduled for Jan. 15, 2024. It's unclear when a verdict may come.

Dentsu was a key force in landing the Olympics for Tokyo in 2013. French prosecutors have looked

into allegations that IOC members may have been bribed to vote for Tokyo.

Once the Olympics landed in Tokyo, Dentsu became the chief marketing arm of the Games and raised a record \$3.3 billion in local sponsorship. Dentsu received a commission on the sales — sales that were at least twice as large as any previous Olympics.

The reports of corruption surrounding Dentsu also forced the resignation in 2019 of Tsunekazu Takeda, the head of the Japanese Olympic Committee and an IOC member who headed Olympic marketing.

Tokyo organizers say they spent \$13 billion to organize the 2020 Olympics, which were delayed a year by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, a government audit suggests the expenditure might have been twice that. At least 60% was public money.

The Tokyo scandal ruined the chances of the northern city of Sapporo of landing the 2030 Winter Olympics. It had been a strong

favorite but was forced to withdraw. The IOC last week said it favored a French Alps bid for the 2030 Games with Salt Lake City the preferred choice for 2034. Earlier this year French police searched the headquarters of the 2024 Paris Olympics in an investigation over contracts linked to the Games.

In the wake of the scandal, Dentsu has been restricted from bidding on contracts for the Tokyo Metropolitan Government and by the city of Osaka and the local prefecture, which is hosting the 2025 World Exposition. Tokyo prosecutors have also been investigating a separate bribery scandal centered around Haruyuki

Takahashi, a former Dentsu executive. Takahashi was a member of the Tokyo Olympic organizing committee and wielded powerful influence over the Olympic business.

Takahashi's trial opens Dec. 14. He has not publicly acknowledged guilt, or made any statement, and speculation is rife he will fight the charges.

The scandal involving Takahashi involves bribery allegations over Olympic sponsorships that were won by companies such as Aoki Holdings, a clothing company that dressed Japan's Olympic team, and Sun Arrow, which produced the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic mascots. □

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Patrick Mahomes headlines list of nominees for the Walter Payton NFL Man of the Year award

By **JOSH DUBOW** AP Pro Football Writer

Two-time league MVP Patrick Mahomes headlines the list of 32 players chosen as finalists for the Walter Payton NFL Man of the Year award.

Each of the teams nominated one player for the prestigious honor named for the late Payton, a Hall of Fame running back for the Bears. The award recognizes a player for community service and excellence on the field. It has been given annually since 1970 and will be presented at "NFL Honors," the TV show on Feb. 8, during which The Associated Press reveals its individual seasonal award winners. Mahomes will try to join the award's namesake, Payton, and nine other players who have won both the NFL MVP and the NFL Man



Kansas City Chiefs quarterback Patrick Mahomes (15) questions a call against the Green Bay Packers during the second half of an NFL football game Sunday, Dec. 3, 2023 in Green Bay, Wis. (AP Photo/Mike Roemer)

of the Year Award. The others who have pulled off that double are: Kurt War-

ner, LaDainian Tomlinson, Peyton Manning, Dan Marino, Boomer Esiason, John

Elway, Joe Theismann, Ken Anderson and Johnny Unitas.

All 32 nominees will receive a donation of up to \$55,000 in their name to their charity of choice. The winner of the Walter Payton NFL Man of the Year Award will receive a \$250,000 donation to the charity of his choice. All donations are courtesy of the NFL Foundation and Nationwide. Along with the other 31 nominees, Mahomes will wear a Walter Payton NFL Man of the Year helmet decal through the end of the season in recognition of his accomplishments on and off the field. Mahomes was nominated for his work with his foundation, 15 and the Mahomies Foundation, which has placed an emphasis on improving the lives of children with a continued focus on supporting health, wellness, and various communities in need of resources. □

European soccer body UEFA pledges at UN to do more to promote human rights and fight discrimination

By **GRAHAM DUNBAR** AP Sports Writer

GENEVA (AP) — European soccer body UEFA went to the United Nations on Tuesday pledging to do more to promote human rights and protect women from abuse in the sport.

At Champions League games next week, messages will be broadcast on television and social media for the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, UEFA general secretary Theodore Theodoridis said at a sports conference in the UN's European headquarters.

Theodoridis committed UEFA to "strengthen our

fight against discriminations in all their forms" and "admitting your mistakes when you make them."

"This shows leading by ex-

ample," he said, citing UEFA ordering a security review of the chaotic and poorly policed 2022 Champions League final it orga-

nized in Paris that put Liverpool and Real Madrid fans at risk.

"It was a near-miss, I have to say," Theodoridis acknowledged. UEFA now consults more closely with the fan group Football Supporters Europe ahead of major games.

The event Tuesday was hosted by the Geneva-based Centre for Sport & Human Rights, UEFA's risk adviser for the 2024 European Championship in men's soccer which it wants to be inclusive and tackle discrimination.

"Human rights should be inherent in everything we do," Theodoridis said, "in

how we treat people and how we listen to them and how do we deliver on our mission in a way that respects and upholds the fundamental dignity of all people."

UEFA made a joint human rights declaration in Berlin last month with German organizers of Euro 2024 that included a promise that all fans can "exercise their freedom of speech during the tournament."

At the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, fans wearing or carrying rainbow symbols in support of the LGBTQ community became a cultural flashpoint in the conservative emirate. □



The trophy placed in front of a scoreboard showing the final draw, except the play-off winners, after the draw for the UEFA Euro 2024 soccer tournament finals in Hamburg, Germany, Saturday, Dec. 2, 2023. (AP Photo/Martin Meissner)